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TERMINATION OF CONFLICT—THEN WHAT?

BY

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US ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA



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USAWC ESSAY

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The problems of war termination in the post World War II period and the advent of the nuclear age are addressed from the point of view that most conflict will be in the nature of non-nuclear limited war. Yet the nuclear influence will ever be present and the threat of escalation to nuclear war will act as a catalyst to quicken termination. The emergence of a non winner-loser concept is discussed, and the need for an institutionalized approach to conflict termination is shown. The Korean War and the Yom Kippur War are compared to contrast the problems of war termination where super power interests are involved. Research of literature published as books, periodicals, reports and articles was used as a basis to develop the theme and substance of the essay. The provision for a solution to the underlying issues that precipitate each conflict is seen as the only real basis for permanent termination.

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## TERMINATION OF CONFLICT - THEN WHAT?

### INTRODUCTION

The study of war is as complex as the study of human life itself. As life runs a cycle of conception, birth, growth, and demise, so does each war progress through a cycle of cause, initiation, conduct, and termination. In the nature of things it is apparent that human life perpetuates itself as an integral part of the life cycle; similarly, it appears that each war seems to carry within itself the seeds of another conflict.

This analogy of the war cycle to the human life cycle offers an approach for a variety of observations and conclusions pertaining to the very broad subject of war. The limited length of this essay permits attention to only one selected part of the war cycle - namely that of termination. For it is in the ending of wars wherein lies the greatest potential to prevent the seeding of a future conflict. While it is generally accepted that war is a scourge of mankind, a phenomenon of nations' behavior more to be observed and studied than it can be controlled, there is a growing realization that meaningful research into the termination of wars is possible and much needed.

As one pursues the study of war termination, however, it soon becomes evident, for some not easily apparent reasons, that there is a dearth of published material on the subject of war endings. Much has been written on how to prevent war, far more on how to

conduct war, and some on how to limit war; yet practically nothing has been written on how to finish a war. Most of the published material about past wars merely narrates history or discusses the military aspects of conducting the operations involved, either as tactics or strategy. Studies of the problems of terminating a war are relatively rare.

This essay will deal with the problems of war termination to include what makes a war end and what keeps a war from ending. The basic concepts involved will be developed to a degree to permit some specific conclusions about the difficulties that nations face in ending wars. Two post-World War II conflicts will be contrasted to illustrate the problems of terminating a war when big power interests are at stake in the nuclear age.

#### THE WINNERS AND LOSERS CONCEPT

The usual basis for any discussion of termination is that every war will have a winner and a loser. Assumptions are made that wars end with a victor and a vanquished. The war only reaches termination when one adversary "agrees to lose" and to also accept the conditions imposed by the winner. The winner then acknowledges the agreement and imposes the conditions he desires.<sup>1</sup> This conclusion is interpreted similarly by Calahan in his classic, What Makes A War End: "First war is pressed by the victor, but peace is made by the vanquished. Therefore to determine the causes of peace it is always necessary to take the vanquished's point of view. Until the

vanquished quits the war goes on."<sup>2</sup>

Such an agreement is necessary in all except absolute conflicts in which the goal is the total destruction of the enemy whereby struggle ceases only upon extermination of one or more of the contenders. In this case as Hans Spier has said, "Peace terminating an absolute war is established without the enemy."<sup>3</sup> Absolute war such as that which the ever present all-out nuclear exchange potential of the superpowers could create is not considered in this paper. Nuclear war appears exempt from the winner-loser concept for the present as no history of nuclear conflict exists on which to base an analysis. The influence of nuclear war, however, is definitely a factor in any winner-loser situation where one party or the other or both possess nuclear weapons. The conventional war could become readily escalated to the dreaded absolute nuclear conflict.

This prospect of the loser resorting to nuclear retaliation as a last resort is perhaps the most serious factor to spur conflict termination in the world today and places utmost importance on the development of a system of controls to insure that a local incident does not escalate spontaneously to all out nuclear war. The winner must seek to terminate the conflict successfully by terms that preclude the loser from resorting to escalation. This places the adversaries in a highly dangerous game and it seems probable that the pattern will be similar to that outlined by the French strategist Andre Beaufre:

It would seem, therefore, that in the nuclear age the use of force will as a rule be limited to two types of war; in vital areas action is likely to be limited, probably extremely violent but very short, the object being to produce a fait accompli followed immediately by negotiation; in peripheral areas conflict is likely to take the form of prolonged wars of attrition of a low level of intensity and using conventional or guerrilla methods. An example of the first type is the Israel in Sinai, and of the second the wars in Korea, Indo-China and Laos. Any other form of war would lead rapidly to escalation.<sup>4</sup>

The problem of conflict termination has become apparent as a critical one facing the United States today in view of the current efforts to resolve the permanent settlement of the Yom Kippur War. Beaufre's description best describes the conditions on the international scene for the past decade and for the foreseeable future. What approach to termination should be taken? As pointed out by Richard P. Morris in his comprehensive dissertation on conflict resolution:

The problems of termination of conflict appear to present so many variable facets for consideration that little is gained from past experience. Each conflict that has ended has had a unique history of cause, initiation, conduct and termination.<sup>5</sup>

This is reinforced by Ralph E. Strauch in his Rand Corporation study wherein he states:

For once a conflict occurs, the nature of the conflict and the strategic problem it entails may be seen in various ways, each calling for a possibly different response. The set of reasonable formulations and explanations moreover will change as the conflict progresses as well as the objectives and criteria for settlement on both sides. The institutional ability to recognize, articulate and resolve these differences during

a conflict is needed.<sup>6</sup>

This call for the institutional ability points out the lack of attention to war endings by nations as a whole. For while the fighting of wars has been institutionalized in the creation and perpetuation of military forces by all nations, there is no, nor has there been, any formal, perpetual approach to terminating conflict whereby the influence of the personal human element has been reduced and replaced with an institutional approach.

#### VICTORY VERSUS SURRENDER

The concept of the winner being a victor causing the loser to surrender has long been the traditional American approach to war, but no longer applies since the end of World War II. The Korean and Viet Nam wars have forced a hard look at conflict and conflict termination without the fruits of victory or the acknowledgement of surrender. The problems of persuading the adversaries to sit at a bargaining table have been monumental for unless one side chooses simply to abandon the battlefield or unconditionally surrenders, it takes two to end a war. When there is a clear cut victory by one side with defeat accepted by the other, there is firm ground to move ahead to a final settlement. If there is no clear winner-loser basis, only a provisional ending will result with solutions that are temporary expedients to resolve only the critical immediate issues and subsequent postponement of action on underlying issues to some future time undefined or ignored.



The question of what may happen "after" is left open and therein lie the seeds of another war for one or both sides may pursue a political method of exploiting the termination agreement or violating its terms.

It appears that the terms victory and surrender are no longer applicable to most cases of war termination, for only an all-out general war can promise a victor after an all-out effort. Even then the surrender of the other party is questionable. The imposition of unconditional surrender terms upon the Germans during World War II has been recognized by historians as one of the prime factors in the continuation of their resistance.<sup>7</sup> That war of attrition was fought before the nuclear age and the awesome magnitude of an all-out nuclear exchange pushes into further discard the terms of victory and surrender. This requires a brief discussion of the types of conflict expected in the nuclear age whereby nation to nation struggles will continue without resort to nuclear exchange. An understanding of the nature of such struggle is necessary because the conditions of termination depend on a realistic approach to the world as it is today.

#### TYPES OF WAR

According to Khrushchev, in January 1961, in a speech to the Soviet Communist Party, wars are divided into three categories: world wars, local wars, and wars of national liberation.<sup>8</sup> These three categories of war represent the realistic conditions of the

world today and will serve as illustrative examples of the type of conflict generally confronting the United States now and that can be expected to be present for the foreseeable future. The first, World War, is general war and would involve nuclear exchange between the Soviet Union and the United States.

The second, local war, is considered as a small limited and localized conflict. Generally this type of war is interpreted by the Russians to mean a localized war between capitalist states, a civil war between capitalist elements within a state or a war by capitalist states against a revolutionary state or against revolutionary elements within a state. Local war can be escalated to the level of general war and poses the danger of becoming nuclear in nature. The Russians avoid involvement in this type of war as it serves no purpose for their interests.

The third, a war of national liberation, is generally considered as a struggle between revolutionary elements, either Communist or non-Communist, against capitalist governments. Such a war is considered a "just" war and entitled to full support by the Soviet Union as involvement will further their interests.

These three types of war will serve the purpose of illustrating this essay. No attempt is made to further classify and define the many levels and categories of conflict. Suffice it to say that both local wars and wars of liberation are "limited war" and world war is "general war" that is unlimited. The Soviet Union will support and get involved in a limited war as a war of liberation

or avoid involvement by defining the limited war as a local war depending on how the limited war serves Soviet interests.

Since general war is excluded from this essay, all conflict to be discussed will be limited in nature and subject to restrictions by some form of "understanding" for things such as military arms, political objects, choice of weapons, target selection, nature of participating forces and geographic areas. So far there has been room for reconciliation of limited war without violating "understandings" and precipitating escalation to general war with all its nuclear horrors. It is presumed that this pattern will continue and is the only alternative facing the world in the nuclear age.

#### PROBLEMS OF LIMITED CONFLICT

Now that it is proposed that most of the conflicts will fall into the category of limited warfare and can be resolved within those limits, what are some of the considerations to permit termination of the conflict? In other words, what has past experience indicated as essential for a case of termination; first to effect termination, and second to keep termination permanent?

As the concept of pure winner-loser does not apply in limited war, it is fundamental that a "way out" be offered to end the conflict. This means a settlement without victory, yet a settlement that will still provide peace with some of the hoped for fruits of victory. Experience has shown that the antagonists

must be convinced that a cessation of fighting will be more advantageous than its continuation. In other words, the sociologist Lewis A. Coser says:

The smaller the sacrifice a party demands from the opponent, the more limited the aims, the higher the chances that the potential loser will be ready to give up battle. The loser must be led to decide that peace is more attractive than the continuation of the conflict; such a decision will be powerfully enhanced if the demands made upon him are not exorbitant.

One of the prime considerations to end a limited war, therefore, is to find the "way out". This, of course, can be subjected to endless analysis and is only one of the factors involved to effect termination. After the way out is found and fighting ceases, what are the chances of the settlement becoming permanent?

It is postulated that a limited war is only a symptom of a deeper controversy and as the "way out" is conditional upon agreement of both parties to the conflict, so also will be the duration of the resulting peace be dependent upon the interests of the parties involved. If the deep underlying issues that precipitated the initial conflict remain unsolved so will eventual resumption of the conflict occur; whether or not it is resumed at the same location so as to break the termination agreement is a matter of conjecture with too many variables for any other approach. Suffice it to say that the parties to the agreement decide whether or not to continue to honor it based upon individual self-interests that are a prerogative of national sovereignty.

Within the limited scope of this essay there now has been established a basis for discussion about some of the problems of conflict termination facing the United States today. Particularly, the conditions are that the conflict be of the non-nuclear limited war type and that the super powers (Russia-U.S.) are involved through primarily proxy means on one side or the other. The two wars that are appropriate for this comparison are the Korean War and the 1973 Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur War. Both were non-nuclear, yet in the nuclear age that began in World War II and both involved the super powers by proxy in a manner that is prevalent in super power dealings for the present and probably the next decade. These wars illustrate very well the basis for Beufre's statement previously quoted.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE KOREAN WAR

As pointed out by Hobbs in his monumental study, What is Victory in War, the Korean War was fought under significant limitations. The American participation was overt and conducted under the banner of the United Nations. The Communist Chinese and Russian participation was covert. The major restraint was that the Soviet Union did not openly intervene. Other major restraints were no use of nuclear weapons, no use of air power outside the Korean peninsula, negligible use of Communist air power in South Korea, no use of U.S. naval power outside Korean waters and negligible Communist naval activity.<sup>11</sup>

Under these conditions, as pointed out by Ickle in Every War Must End:

The Korean War, in contrast to World War II, was a typically stalemated war. Neither side was militarily defeated and neither side could have developed a realistic plan to overwhelm the enemy. The fighting might have lasted even longer had it not been for the fact that a repartitioning of Korea could be so easily arranged and that this partition practically restored the status quo.<sup>12</sup>

The outcome is a classic of a way out with neither victory nor defeat for either side. Such a settlement came about primarily because of the super powers who in reality controlled the opponents through proxy agreed that a stalemate would be acceptable.

This search for an exit was a costly and time consuming process. Negotiations dragged on for years while fighting continued. More Americans were killed during the two years of truce negotiations than during the first year of the war before negotiations started. Among all the United Nations forces, fatalities during the negotiating period were about double those suffered previously.<sup>13</sup>

Many other problems had to be faced in terminating the Korean War but the search for a way out dragged on the conflict till the super powers finally agreed that a stalemate offered the only means of conclusion.

Such agreement came about only after long jockeying for bargaining positions. As Henry Kissinger wrote in his Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy:

The fluctuation of our objectives demonstrated that it is impossible to conduct limited wars on the basis of purely military considerations . . .

The attempt by both sides to achieve a position of strength prior to negotiation resulted in a vicious circle of gradually expanding commitments which was brought to a halt only because an equilibrium was gradually established between the physical inability of Communist China to invest more resources in the conflict and our psychological unwillingness to do so.<sup>14</sup>

Yet there appears to be no permanent termination to the Korean conflict other than an indefinite threat of nuclear escalation if the armistice is broken by the North Koreans. This veiled nuclear fist appeared in a 29 August 1975 interview when Secretary of Defense Schlessinger refused to renounce the right of the United States to exercise first use of nuclear weapons if the North Koreans were to disturb the armistice in view of the American defeat in South Viet Nam.<sup>15</sup>

The spectre of nuclear escalation did little to hasten the negotiations for termination of the Korean conflict. At that time the United States alone possessed the capability for such action and chose to limit the war to conventional means.

#### THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

To compare problems of termination let's look at another limited war some 20 years later - the Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur War of 1973. The similarity to the Korean War - a proxy fight again involving super power backing. A limited war (by Soviet definition - one in which it was not directly involved) using conventional forces. The difference from the Korean War - no stalemate.

The war rapidly progressed to the point where a way out became

necessary to terminate the fighting when the Egyptians no longer could maintain the offensive and were in danger of losing their army. The difference in the 20 years growth of the nuclear escalation spectre now came to bear in this conflict. Whereas, in 1953 only the U.S. possessed nuclear capability, now both of the super powers could bring in tactical or strategic nuclear weapons. The search for a way out had to be done under a real threat of nuclear escalation that became much more imminent when an apparent stalemate rapidly turned into a potential defeat for the Arabs by the Israel Defense Force's outflank maneuver behind the Egyptian Army.

The precipitating cause of this war was different from that of the Korean War. It is a good example of the previously discussed limited war that resumes when the underlying issues that precipitated the initial conflict remain unresolved and act as the seeds of the future conflict. One of the best analyses of this war to date comes from the writings of the London Sunday Times Insight Team in their book, The Yom Kippur War:

The triggering of the war was deliberate. At the end of March 1973 Sadat gave an interview to Arnaud de Borchgrave of Newsweek. Sadat repeated that negotiations had now finally failed and that war was necessary. After contact with the world's major powers there was only one conclusion 'If we don't take the case into our own hands there will be no movement . . . Everything in this country is now being mobilized in earnest for resumption of the battle - which is now inevitable'. Sadat had "run out of ideas" for peace . . . and if there was not to be peace 'This will be the nightmare to end all nightmares - and everyone will



be losers'. The decision on the war was made in April 1973 according to President Sadat and at that time virtually no one believed him.<sup>16</sup>

To continue from the Yom Kippur War:

Sadat and Asad (of Syria) had been holding their own . . . summit. Together they had finalized the details of war. The war arms they had agreed on were gravely simple. A final solution - ominous phrase - to the 25 year confrontation with Israel. This was not to be achieved by extermination or genocide, but by sparking a crisis into which the super powers would inevitably be drawn. Sadat's strategy was to force a super power confrontation. Israel would be subjected to a war of attrition - a meat grinder. If the super powers failed, the Arabs would continue for weeks, even months, until Israel through sheer exhaustion of money and lives had to settle.<sup>17</sup>

The war thus began with the limits defined and some thought to the ending. To further its own interests a proxy holder had decided to act without a mandate from the proxy owner. The Arabs were at first astonishingly successful, but, as is the nature of war, instead of the planned meat grinder fate for Israel the Arab army found itself in a giant trap. As foreseen by Sadat the dilemma grew for the super powers who had to protect their interests. The success of Sadat's strategy to force a confrontation was apparent. Again from The Yom Kippur War:

Thus having begun as bystanders and escalated to armors, the Soviet Union and the United States had now accepted a decisive further commitment as arbiters. The only role left for them to play was that of direct combatants. To avert that the super powers had now taken over . . . The Soviet Union could not stand idly by while the Egyptian war machine was systematically smashed . . . Willy-Nilly the two super powers were being drawn into

confrontation . . . Brezhnev warned that the Soviet Union "would not permit" a repeat of 1967. To prevent it the Soviet Union might have to move to "a phase of further involvement with incalculable consequences".<sup>18</sup>

This threat of escalation along with the imminent direct confrontation with Russia in the war area led to a seizure of the termination initiative by the United States and the working out of a cease fire in the shortest time possible with the final terms to effect a permanent settlement postponed to a future date. A familiar pattern of termination practice again emerged. Only the time factor was different from the Korean War. The nuclear spectre now had a definite influence upon the speed of settlement with impetus to a provisional ending that once more solved only the immediate critical issues.

As for the prospects of permanent settlement to sterilize the seeds of the next conflict inherent in the unresolved underlying issues let us quote Henry Kissinger:

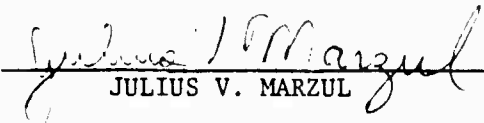
Of course certain and permanent control still eludes the super powers. Nonetheless they are the ones who make the conflict possible, who draw up the rules of the game - and whose interests, at the end of the day, are the decisive interests. Logically of course this is clear to most of the people in the Middle East. Emotionally it is perhaps the hardest part of all to accept and act upon. It is not easy to think of one's compatriots - one's own friends and children as pawns in a game played by people whose ultimate interest is not even the advancement of the immediate enemy's cause . . . The consideration is simply this: The United States cannot either today or tomorrow, allow Soviet arms to achieve a great victory - though it may not be a decisive victory - over American arms. This is a

question that has nothing to do with you, nor with Israel either. This is a question which is directly related to the balance of powers between the super powers.<sup>19</sup>

### CONCLUSIONS

The termination of conflict is a fertile area for further study. Not only is there a need for an institutional approach to permit a systematic ending of each conflict itself; there is a critical concomitant that the ending be effected with some provision to resolve the underlying issues that precipitated the conflict.

It appears that the parameters for limited war, as far as such have been established, do not usually include the means to terminate the war. Termination is the final act in the play of war. Yet the final act script is left unwritten even as the play begins and progresses. Only as time runs out and the final curtain inevitably approaches is the last act script hastily written and thrust onto the unprepared actors. The result is predictable; the performance will be poor at best.

  
JULIUS V. MARZUL

## FOOTNOTES

1. Ralph E. Strauch, Winners and Losers, A Conceptual Barrier in our Strategic Thinking, p. 34.
2. H.A. Calahan, What Makes A War End, p. 18.
3. Hans Speer, Social Order and the Risks of War, p. 223.
4. Andre Beaufre, An Introduction to Strategy, p. 91.
5. Richard P. Morris, Ending American Revolution, p. 356.
6. Strauch, p. 17.
7. Paul Kecskemeti, Strategic Surrender, p. 223.
8. U.S. Congress Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Analysis of the Krushchev Speech of Jan, 6, 1961, p. 63.
9. Lewis A. Coser, The Termination of Conflict, p. 349.
10. Beaufre, p. 91.
11. Richard W. Hobbs, What is Victory in War, Vol II, p. 50.
12. Fred Charles Ickle, Every War Must End, p. 95.
13. Ibid, p. 55, p. 90.
14. Henry A. Kissinger, Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy, p. 50.
15. James R. Schlesinger, Air Force Policy Letter for Commanders, 15 September 1975.
16. London Sunday Times Insight Team, The Yom Kippur War, p. 62.
17. Ibid, p. 88.
18. Ibid, p. 372 - 378.
19. Ibid, p. 491 - 493.

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Item 20 continued.

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